

TESTIMONY OF WINSTON HEIMER
Before the
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY
FEBRUARY 11, 2010

Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and members of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you.

My name is Winston Heimer and I am the volunteer public policy chair for the Connecticut Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association. I am here today to talk about the Alzheimer's Respite Care Program.

Caring for a loved one who has Alzheimer's disease is a labor of love but it can be stressful. Caregivers need a break. I should know. I took care of my wife alone for five years after she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's.

I was not a recipient of the respite care program because I am fortunate enough to have had the ability to pay for respite care. However, I do know that there are numerous individuals around the state who cannot afford to do what I did for my wife. What I can share with you is the value of respite periods because caring for someone with Alzheimer's can prolong their ability to care for loved ones longer at home.

Respite care gives someone like me time to take a break; time for rest or relief from daily concerns; time to pursue some personal interests. It helps give a caregiver the strength to continue taking care of a loved one at home.

Care giving for a family member is very stressful and in fact in many cases the person with Alzheimer's will outlive the caregiver because of the constant 24/7 supervision required to take care of that person. That's why respite care is so important.

More than 70,000 Connecticut residents are living with Alzheimer's disease or related dementia. Nearly 113,000 Connecticut caregivers - primarily family members - provide more than 97 million hours of unpaid care for residents with some form of dementia valued at approximately \$1 billion.

The state needs to prepare for this epidemic, which is quickly becoming the country's biggest, broadest and most expensive problem to families, businesses and the healthcare system.

Aside from the human burdens, healthcare costs are more than three times higher for people with Alzheimer's and other dementias than for other people without the disease due to the specialized care required by those with Alzheimer's. Failure to respond to these needs can only compromise the well-being of these persons with dementia and their informal caregivers, and increase future demand for more costly care.

The Alzheimer's Respite Care Program provides caregiver relief from the overwhelming task of ongoing care for a loved one with dementia, including an assessment and purchase of necessary services.

This session we urge you to support re-opening the Respite Care program which the Governor closed to new enrollees as of May 2009, and retain current funding at \$2.3 million for the 2011 fiscal year. Over 900 participants were served last year and over 400 are on the waiting list desperately in need of these essential respite services.

We understand the enormity of the budget deficit facing the state and appreciate all your efforts to preserve this vital program. This is a small investment and cost containment measure toward the goal of transitioning from nursing home institutionalization to community-based care. Conservatively if the program kept just 10% of the people served last year from entering a nursing home on Medicaid it saved the state \$50 million in expenses. If that is not results based accounting I don't know what is. Having closed intake for this program will increase the budget deficit.

Thank you and I'd be happy to answer any questions
